

Assessing Adults with Learning Difficulties



NetNews

An online newsletter devoted to adult literacy



Does this student seem familiar to you?

Ms. K. has attended ABE classes for almost one year and has had significant difficulty in making progress in reading. She has passed some of the GED tests, but has struggled with others due to having insufficient time to complete them. She currently works as a teacher's aide in a daycare center. Her goal is to pass the GED and attend college.

Ms. K. first began to have learning difficulties in first grade. She received speech and language services and remedial reading and math instruction during elementary school, but was not diagnosed with a learning disability until she was 16 years old. She dropped out of school soon after. She reports that her brother has also been diagnosed with learning disabilities.

Ms. K. was referred to LDA Minnesota for assessment, to identify learning disabilities, determine productive learning strategies, and establish whether she meets criteria to request accommodations on GED tests.

Does this student profile remind you of any of your students who are having difficulty progressing in one or more subject areas even after intensive instruction? Does he or she have a history of learning difficulties? If you answered yes to these questions, you may want to consider referring the student for assessment for a learning disability, Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, or other learning concern. ∞

Types of Assessment Available from LDA:

Learning Disability Assessment – confirms or rules out the presence of a specific learning disability. Feedback improves student self-understanding and also includes instructional recommendations and required documentation for requesting GED accommodations, Adult Diploma waivers, or post-secondary accommodations.

Diagnostic Assessment – determines the presence of other cognitive problems, including ADHD. Feedback improves student self-understanding and also includes instructional recommendations and required documentation for requesting GED accommodations.

Adult Reading Profile – determines strengths and weaknesses in alphabets (phonemic awareness and decoding), fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension, resulting in self-understanding and recommendations for improving reading instruction.

The goal of an assessment is to clearly identify the existence and evaluate the impact of a neurological (from birth) or acquired (from brain injury) learning disability, attention deficit, or other learning difficulty. A comprehensive assessment includes not only standardized test results and interpretation, but also history, observation, and analysis of the functional limitations of a learning difficulty on the adult's performance in school, work, and life.∞

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The following can signal a possible learning disability and/or ADHD. Observation of these signs is reason to seek further evaluation at LDA:

- Learning difficulties beginning in the early grades
- Special Education services provided during school years
- A family history of learning disabilities
- Patterns of achievement are inconsistent
- Does not appear to be working up to potential
- Frequently needs to have instructions repeated
- Appears distracted or forgetful
- Lifelong difficulties with oral language, reading, writing, math, reasoning, or organizational skills
- Secondary problems with self-esteem, motivation, jobs, or relationships
- Difficulty improving scores on the GED practice tests

Specifically with reading:

- Difficulty sounding out words
- Slower reading rate than others
- Difficulty understanding what is read

Specifically with spelling:

- Reversing words, like “saw” for “was”
- Leaving out letters when spelling a word
- Avoiding use of words that are difficult to spell

Specifically with mathematics:

- Poor adding, subtracting, multiplication, and/or division skills
- Inability to memorize the multiplication tables
- Difficulty understanding word problems
- Difficulty remembering the sequence and steps to solve a math problem

Assessment for Adult Learning Difficulties includes the Following Components:

- ◆ Interview on personal, medical, family, and language, both current situation and background
- ◆ Information on current academic functioning and history of educational difficulties and/or special services
- ◆ Previous assessment results (if available)
- ◆ Observations
- ◆ Testing to determine cognitive strengths and weaknesses
- ◆ Testing to determine achievement strengths and weaknesses
- ◆ Analysis of all components to provide a diagnosis statement for the learning disability, ADHD, or other disorder
- ◆ Educational recommendations for instruction, accommodation, and/or referral

LDA Assessments Provide:

1. Self-understanding of cognitive and achievement strengths and weaknesses
2. Documentation of a learning disability in order to request reasonable accommodations for testing, school, or work
3. Recommendations leading to prescriptive and more effective instruction

If you suspect one of your students may have a learning disability, ADHD, or some other learning disorder, refer them to LDA for an assessment. LDA Minnesota is funded by the Minnesota Department of Education to provide comprehensive learning assessments at no cost to Minnesota ABE students; however the student must be enrolled in an instructional ABE program and be referred by his or her ABE teacher.

In addition, the Student Progress Policy states that if a student does not show defined educational progress within 24 months of service, a one-time six-month intervention plan **MUST** be implemented. LDA assessment services are one of the recommended actions of an intervention plan for non-progressing students (those not demonstrating NRS level completion).

BUT YOU DON'T HAVE TO WAIT for your student to fail. LDA assessments focus on providing information to improve core performance indicators such as level-change, completion of a GED or diploma, and the transition to post-secondary training/education or work.



WHAT IS ADHD?

Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a neurobiological disorder characterized by developmentally inappropriate levels of inattention, impulsivity, and hyperactivity. ADHD is a lifespan condition that affects children, adolescents and adults of all ages. It affects both males and females, and people of all races and cultural backgrounds.

For a diagnosis of ADHD, some impairment from the symptoms must be present in two or more settings (school, work, home). Examples of significant impairment include:

- ◆ Job loss because of ADHD symptoms.
- ◆ Difficulty maintaining relationships with family members or friends.
- ◆ Financial trouble due to impulsive spending.
- ◆ Academic probation in school due to failing grades.

WHAT IS LD?

A learning disability is a neurobiological disorder where the brain works or is structured in such a way that it impedes the ability to receive, store, process, or produce information. A learning disability can affect one's ability to speak, listen, read, write, spell, reason, recall, organize information, and/or do mathematics.

- ◆ At least average ability to learn as measured by intellectual or cognitive testing.
- ◆ Significant difficulty with information processing (receiving or input, processing or integration, storing or memory, producing or output) as measured by intellectual or cognitive functioning tests, observation, interview, or checklists.
- ◆ Significant difficulties with listening, speaking, reading, writing, math, or reasoning as measured by academic achievement tests.

WHAT LD and ADHD ARE NOT:

- ◆ Significant visual (seeing), auditory (hearing), or physical (motor) problems.
- ◆ Low ability as measured by intellectual or cognitive functioning tests.
- ◆ Severe emotional problems or mental health disorders.
- ◆ Lack of schooling, educational opportunity, or cultural differences.



Common Learning Disabilities:

Dyslexia – a learning disability in reading (decoding, comprehension, fluency)

Dyscalculia – a learning disability in math (computation, word problems, reasoning)

Dysgraphia – a learning disability in writing (punctuation, capitalization, usage, writing proper sentences and/or paragraphs)





The LDA assessment process is as follows:

1. Contact Wendy Sweeney, LDA Assessment Coordinator, at ws@ldaminnesota.org to request an application for assessment of an ABE student.
2. Complete the application with your student and return to Wendy via mail or fax to: 952-922-8102.
3. After reviewing an application from a metro-area ABE student and teacher, LDA will contact the student to set up two appointments for cognitive and achievement testing.
4. After reviewing an application from an outstate student and teacher, Wendy will contact the referring teacher to set up cognitive and achievement testing at the ABE program site.
5. Following the completion of the two testing appointments, a written report will be prepared by the examiners. This typically takes approximately four weeks to complete and review.
6. The final report can be shared with the student at LDA offices during a feedback conference, or it can be mailed to the instructor and reviewed with the teacher and/or student during a phone conference.
7. If the student meets criteria for requesting GED accommodations, the appropriate request form will be completed by LDA and sent to the referring teacher.



LEARNING DISABILITIES ASSOCIATION OF MINNESOTA

5354 Parkdale Drive
Suite 200
St. Louis Park, MN 55416

Ph: 952.922.8374
Fax: 952.922.8102
E: info@ldaminnesota.org

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Please visit us at
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Learning Disabilities Association of Minnesota (LDA), Inc. is the state's leading educational non-profit agency helping children, youth, and adults with or at risk for learning disabilities, attention deficits, or other learning difficulties. For more than 40 years, LDA has served people of all ages with learning difficulties so they may lead more productive and fulfilled lives.

Services include diagnostic assessments, consultations, family literacy activities, intensive in-school instruction, transition to post-secondary programming for ages 14-21, parent and professional training, public education, and high-quality educational products. LDA has special expertise in Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and provides workshops, support groups, and free phone consultations for parents of children with ADHD, adults with ADHD, and professionals.

LDA is a statewide supplemental service provider for ABE offering:

- Free assessments for learning disabilities and/or ADHD for ABE students referred by their instructors

For more information about LDA Assessment Services, contact Wendy Sweeney ws@ldaminnesota.org or call (952) 582-6020.



The mission of LDA Minnesota is to help children, youth, and adults with learning difficulties learn successfully, dream of possibilities, and achieve their goals.